THE MARXIAN CRITIQUE OF THE HEGELIAN DIALECTIC
From the ideal reproduction of an ideal process to the ideal reproduction of a real process.

Abstract

This article examines the connection between Hegel's and Marx's respective dialectical methods in the light of the recent Marxist debates on the subject matter. It argues that the development of the Marxian critique of political economy cannot uncritically appropriate the content or the form of Hegel's dialectical method. More specifically, the article submits that there is a "rational kernel" in Hegel's work, which can be found in his discovery of self-movement as the simplest form taken by the real. However, insofar as he takes a pure thought-form as point of departure, which, moreover, results from an act of absolute abstraction, the aforementioned "rational kernel" becomes expounded under a "mystical shell". As a consequence, his dialectic remains external to the movement of the real concrete.

Keywords: dialectical method; materialism; idealism; logic; capital

THE MARXIAN CRITIQUE OF THE HEGELIAN DIALECTIC. From the ideal reproduction of an ideal process to the ideal reproduction of a real process

Gastón Caligaris

Guido Starosta

National University of Quilmes, Argentina

Introduction

The question of the link between Marx and Hegel has been present since the beginning of Marxism as one of its great topics under debate. For the first generation of Marxists, the recovery of Hegel's work essentially involved its contribution to understanding the great laws of the existence of material reality (Engels, 1986). Then, to the extent that these laws could be applied to the different fields of study, the task of the researcher was limited to reflecting in thought the movement of the concrete phenomena governed by these laws (Plekhanov, 1964; Lenin, 1983). The so-called Western Marxism strongly criticized this interpretation for its objectivism, its naivety and, fundamentally, for its economistic corollary (Korsch, 1971; Lukács, 2002; Gramsci, 2004). Faced with this, it proposed a recovery of Hegel's work where the emphasis was placed on the role of subjectivity in historical processes. Thus, this tradition proposed to recover in particular the Hegelian categories of consciousness and alienation for the understanding of the historical evolution of capitalism (Lukács, 2002; Marcuse, 1997). However, this refreshing reading of the link between the works of Marx and Hegel kept the discussion at a high level of generality. In particular, while critical of the mechanical application of the general laws of dialectics to the field of economics, this reading did not offer a real alternative for the understanding of the dialectic of economic forms presented by Marx in his critique of political economy. This insufficiency began to be overcame in the 1960s thanks to the intellectual effort of a group of German Marxists who were concerned with investigating the method underlying the exposition of Capital, particularly in its first chapters (Euchner & Schmidt, 1968; Backhaus, 1978; 1997; Reichelt, 1970; Schmidt, 1973). Later recognized as the "New Reading of Marx" (Backhaus, 1997; Elbe, 2008) this interpretative line, however, was practically encapsulated in Germany without ever reaching a significant diffusion.[1]

[1] With the exception of the famous article by Backhaus (1978), it is only in recent years that the works of the 'New Reading of Marx' have begun to be known outside German-speaking circles thanks to the translation of some works (Reichelt, 1995; 2005; 2007; Backhaus, [1992] 2007; 2005; Heinrich, 2008; 2011, for example). It should also be noted in this regard that Reichelt's classic book (1970) had already been published in Italian in the 1970s (Reichelt, 1973) and that a translation of Backhaus's work (2009) into Italian has recently appeared.

The project of linking the Hegelian dialectic with the Marxian critique of political economy only gained new impetus, greater concreteness, and a truly international scope, with the work of what is now known as the 'New Dialectic' (Murray (1988), Reuten and Williams (1989), Smith (1990), Moseley (1993), Moseley and Campbell (1997), Burns & Fraser (2000). Arthur (2002), Albritton and Smoulidis (2003) and Robles Báez (2005), Moseley & Smith (2014) among others).[2] In contrast to traditional interpretations of the link between the works of Marx and Hegel, this new trend within the specialized literature has focused, in line with its predecessors in the 'New Reading of Marx', on the methodological relevance of Hegelian thought to Marx's critique of political economy. More specifically, while traditional studies of this link focused on the relationship between Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit and Marx's 1844 Manuscripts, these new studies are especially characterized by focusing on the link between Hegel's Logic and Marx's Capital.[3] Although there are several specific controversies about the precise nature of the link between these two works, in a general way it can be said that this new interpretation finds that the argumentative structure of Capital is organized under a form that, at least, finds formal inspiration in the general form taken by the deployment of categories presented in the Logic. Thus, Marx's exposition is seen as the development of capital from its simplest to its most complex forms, in a movement that is characterized, to paraphrase Marx, as the reproduction of the internal life of that object through thought. In turn, to the extent that the passage or transition from one form of capital to another is conceived as springing from the development of the immanent contradictions of each form in question, the links between them are conceived as immanent and necessary, in open opposition to the externality proper to the use of formal logic.

As noted below, such an "Italian connection" is one of the ways in which the two traditions have been indirectly linked.

[2] Although in general terms this most recent layer of contributions has developed relatively independently of German discussions, this does not mean that it has not been influenced (to different degrees depending on the authors) by the ideas that emerged in the German-speaking intellectual world. Beyond the general familiarity of the authors of the 'New Dialectic' with these German works, in some cases this link has been very close, especially in the case of the "Italian connection" (Bellofiore, 2014; Bellofiore & Redolfi Riva, 2015; Fineschi, 2009a; 2014). Partly thanks to it, in recent times both traditions have converged in an explicit dialogue (Bellofiore & Fineschi, 2009); see also Murray (2013) for a critical evaluation of Backhaus's celebrated article on the form of value from the perspective of the New Dialectic.

[3] To a large extent, the development of this new trend has been conveyed by the activities of a renowned group of economists and philosophers of various nationalities around the International Symposium on Marxian Theory. In addition to the greater scope and global dissemination of their works, the production of this group stands out, in contrast to the pioneering German contributions mentioned above, for developing the dialectical-systematic reconstruction of the critique of political economy beyond the simplest determinations of the commodity, money and capital. More specifically, topics corresponding to more specific aspects of Volume 1 of Capital have been addressed, as well as topics related to the subsequent volumes and manuscripts prior to the definitive version of the Marxian critique. (Arthur & Reuten, 1998; Campbell & Reuten, 2002; Bellofiore & Taylor, 2004; Moseley, 2005; Bellofiore, Starosta, & Thomas, 2013).

Despite this general consensus, within the 'new dialectic' two general tendencies can be identified (Bellofiore, 2014, p. 167 et seq.). First, there is a group of authors who investigate the connection between Logic and Capital through what they call the 'homology thesis'. Of all the interpretations that form this perspective, probably the most representative is that of Christopher Arthur, according to whom there is a very close 'homology between the structure of Hegel's Logic and Marx's Capital' (Arthur, 2002, p. 7). According to this approach, it is possible – and above all revealing – to carry out a strict mapping of most of the categories of Logic in the systematic presentation of Capital, 'since capital is a peculiar object that is founded on a process of real abstraction in exchange in a sense very similar to that in which Hegel conceives the dissolution and reconstruction of reality by means of the power of abstraction of thought' (Arthur, 2002, p. 8). The second tendency within the 'systematic dialectic' consists of what might be called a 'materialist reading' of Hegel's work in general and of his Logic in particular. Within this group of authors, Tony Smith (1990) is perhaps the most emblematic author of this perspective. In short, this author's essential argument is that the Hegelian dialectic, despite Marx's repeated assertions to the contrary, coincides fully with the Marxian dialectic. Thus, Logic is read as a systematic dialectical exposition of the fundamental ontological structures of real material being; that is, it is read as a 'materialist ontology' (Smith, 1990, p. 8). The relevance of Logic, therefore, lies in the fact that it provides the basic categories that are necessary to grasp the 'intelligibility' of the material world (Smith, 1990, p. 5).

In short, while according to Arthur's approach the content of Logic is pure idealism, for Smith's approach it is pure materialism. In turn, while for Arthur Logic can serve exclusively to enhance the knowledge of capitalist social forms, for Smith its field of 'application' or relevance is broader and can, in principle, include both non-capitalist social forms and natural forms. Finally, while from the point of view of the development of the Marxian critique of political economy for Arthur the question is to reveal the homologous logical forms that are implicit in the internal connection between the different forms of capital, for Smith the question is to become aware of the general ontological structures that organize the systematic ordering of economic categories.

Considered in this way, the current debate around the Hegelian heritage of Marxian critique within the 'New Dialectic' can be synthesized in a single fundamental point: what is the meaning and relevance of Logic for the development of the critique of political economy. Seen from Marx's repeated synthesis of his critique of Hegel, it could be said that the debate revolves around clarifying precisely what is the 'rational core' within the (presumed) 'mystical shell present in Hegel's Logic (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 91; Marx, 1999, p. 20). In this context, the present article aims to contribute to the debate in question by offering an alternative to the two perspectives developed above on the connection

between Hegel's Logic and Marx's Capital within the 'New Dialectic'. Based on the work of Juan Iñigo Carrera regarding the relationship between the dialectical method and the critique of political economy (Iñigo Carrera, 1992; 2007; 2013a; 2013b), we will argue, first, that the scientific and methodological significance that Logic has for the critique of political economy, that is, what Marx calls its 'rational kernel', does not result from its condition as a peculiar inverted social ontology arising from the process of abstraction that characterizes the value-form, as Arthur argues (Arthur, 2002, p. 82), but from presenting the unfolding of the simplest determination of the real. Second, we will argue that this Hegelian unfolding cannot be taken simply and immediately, as Smith suggests, since it necessarily entails a 'mystical shell' affecting it.

Two opposing positions on what is the 'rational core' and what is the 'mystical shell' of Hegel's Logic

In the founding texts of 'dialectical materialism' Hegel's Logic appears to contain 'the great laws of dialectics' that can then be applied by the Marxist researcher to various concrete objects such as history, capitalism, etc. It is argued, however, that Hegel would have discovered these laws 'in his idealist way, as simple laws of thought' (Engels, 1986, p. 321). But insofar as these texts do not present a critique of the specific content developed in Logic, it is understood that the 'rational core' of this work consists, for this interpretation, in the dialectical deployment of the categories as presented by Hegel himself. On the other hand, the 'mystical shell' is seen in the fact that for Hegel the subject of these different logical forms is not the real human being who 'reflects' in his brain the structure and movement of nature, but the 'absolute idea'. Synthetically, this position can be seen in Lenin's famous aphorism, according to which the question is to 'read Hegel materialistically [...] that is, to discard God, the absolute, the pure idea, etc.' (Lenin, 1986, p. 91). Considered in this way, then, it would seem that for this interpretation the question is simply to replace Hegel's idealist terminology with one of a materialist type; for example, changing the word 'idea' to the word 'matter'.

This orthodox interpretation has been challenged by two opposing positions within the so-called 'New Dialectic'. The first interpretation, in line with the reading represented by Arthur (2002), argues that uncritically appropriating the dialectical method deployed in Logic necessarily implies accepting Hegelian absolute idealism. In this sense, for this reading there is no 'rational core' to be discovered. In contrast, the second interpretation, in line with the reading represented by Smith (1990), argues that this work is not about a metaphysical super-subject, but simply systematically deploys all the categories necessary to make intelligible the most abstract ontological structures of the material

world. As a consequence, this reading tends to conclude that there is really no 'mystical sheath' to be revealed.

As Bellofiore (2014) has recently made clear, the position represented by Arthur within the 'New Dialectic' can be found insinuated many years earlier in the work of Colletti (1977).[4] For the purposes of our discussion, the interesting thing about the latter author is that, while Arthur and those who currently share his position tend to assume Hegelian absolute idealism as a "datum", and then develop from this general foundation the idea of an isomorphism or homology between capital and the Idea, Colletti's works have the richness of explicitly giving the discussion about the idealist character of Hegelian philosophy through a detailed analysis of the text of the Logic.[5] And it is on the basis of these arguments that Colletti concludes that there is an intimate link between the idealist character of Hegel's philosophy and the dialectical method. In this sense, we consider that in order to discuss the interpretation within the 'New Dialectic' according to which there is no rational nucleus within Hegel's Logic, or rather, that this rational nucleus is constituted precisely by its mystical shell given the very mysticism of the capital-form, it is more fruitful to recover and examine Colletti's position in this regard.

According to this author, the main achievement of Logic is to offer, for the first time in the history of philosophy, a solid exposition and justification of the 'principle of idealism'; which, he argues, is done precisely by resorting to the dialectical method (Colletti, 1977, pp. 8-9). To present his position, Colletti analyzes the dialectic of the finite and infinite presented by Hegel at the beginning of Logic. There he finds that, instead of taking the finite and the infinite simply in the separation in which they are presented, Hegel criticizes this separation as the product of a foolish 'understanding' and seeks to overcome it by the dialectization of the finite, where it is denied in and of itself and, in this way, superseded as

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[4] Arthur (2000, pp. 130, n. 45) credits Colletti with having brought to light early on the relevance of the Hegelian dialectic to understand the peculiar inverted ontology of capital, but maintains that this author could not be consistent with the implications of this discovery and did not go beyond pointing out this isomorphism; that is, he did not positively develop the thesis of homology through a systematic dialectic of capital. In this sense, it could be said that Colletti raises and examines in depth the general foundation of the homology thesis but is paralyzed and does not advance in its necessary corollary. For his part, Arthur assumes the foundation as given, but develops it through a detailed reconstruction of the exhibition architecture of Capital based on the "mapping" of the different categories of Logic. Moreover, it should be noted that the early recognition of the "ontological isomorphism" between capital and absolute spirit or the Hegelian concept can also be found, at the same time, in Reichelt's (1970) German contribution.

[5] Strictly speaking, Arthur argues that evidence can be found in Hegel's texts for the two possible interpretations, that of the absolute idealist and the materialist or non-metaphysical interpretation of Tony Smith (Arthur, 2000, pp. 105-108). That is, he argues that Hegel is ambiguous about it and quotes can be found to support one or the other reading. But he concludes that in any case he takes that of the absolute idealist because, at the same time that it is plausible as a reading of Hegel, it is the one that is relevant or significant to understand the determinations of capital through the thesis of homology.

infinite, that is, as something not real or ideal. In this way, in contrast to the old idealism that was limited to the mere negation of the finite, Hegel incorporates the finite into the infinite and thus manages to present his idealism – the realm of the infinite – in a rationally coherent way. In other words, Hegel becomes an idealist, and particularly an absolute and coherent idealist, precisely by turning the finite into a finite dialectic, that is, by using the dialectical method. In Colletti's words:

> In practice, this innovation [of Hegel] means the following: it is no longer only said that the finite has no true reality, that it has no being of its own, but it is added that the finite has as its essence and foundation the "other" of itself, that is, the infinite, the immaterial, thought. [...] The finite "is not" when it is truly finite; [...] The finite is dialectical. [...] The finite "true" is not, therefore, the finite that is outside the infinite, but the finite interior to this, the finite as such is in the Idea. "Real" are not things external to thought, but "thought" things, that is, things are no longer things but simple "logical" objects or ideal moments. (Colletti, 1977, pp. 15-17).

Now, if we examine carefully the dialectic of the finite that is expounded in Logic, it is clear that, pace Colletti, in these pages there is no demonstration of the ideal character of the sensible material world, and therefore no argument is offered there to justify the idealist nature of the Hegelian system. The only thing Hegel is showing there is that the fact that things are 'finite' means only that they carry within them the necessity of their own negation. And that, consequently, they cannot be correctly grasped if they are represented as self-subsisting entities or immediate affirmations. On the contrary, things or objects need to be grasped as self-movements, that is, as subjects of their own qualitative transformation into another 'finite' form. For Hegel, the qualitative determination of an object itself is only realized when it becomes another object, a 'movement' that is 'the return to itself by means of its own negation' (Hegel, 1993a, p. 188). In other words, Hegel's whole point in those pages is that the 'true infinite' is nothing but the immanent self-movement of the finite in its affirmation through self-negation. In fact, the 'true infinite' is already the 'being for itself' where, as will be indicated later, 'qualitative being is finally fulfilled' (Hegel, 1993a, p. 201).[6] In short, all Hegel is trying to make is that the real forms of 'being' are affirmed by their own negation, i.e., that reality develops in an immanently contradictory way.

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[6] The fact that in several passages Hegel presents the contradiction that the finite entails as a 'movement' can generate the appearance that it is a process mediated by spatial determination or, as Theunissen suggests, by temporal determination (Theunissen, 1978, p. 269). In our reading, in line with other interpretations (Taylor (2010, p. 203 et seq.); Houlgate (2005, p. 373 ff.), for example), both 'space', 'time' and even 'movement' itself are more developed concrete forms of the simpler determination of affirmation through one's own negation; in this regard, see Iñigo Carrera (2013a, pp. 301-303).

Consequently, Hegel's finding of the self-movement of real forms, which constitutes his great scientific discovery and therefore the rational nucleus to be found in his Logic, is not inherently bound up with his absolute idealism. In this sense, we think that by immediately associating idealism with dialectics, Colletti ends, so to speak, throwing the baby out with the dirty water in the bathtub. In fact, following Iñigo Carrera (2013a, pp. 241-271), it could be argued that it is precisely the rejection of this Hegelian discovery that inevitably leads to an idealist representation of reality. In fact, when real forms are represented as being devoid of any immanent necessity to impel them to their own motion, the forms of 'being' are reduced to inert abstractions which can only be brought into an external relation to each other by means of subjective reflection. As a consequence, the relations between objects thus constructed inevitably remain alien to the immanent nature of things themselves. In this sense, although this does not lead us to consider that ideas 'produce' reality, what does follow is that ideas breathe movement into real forms and, consequently, determine the nature of their relations between them. On the other hand, it is only when things are taken as bearers of the intrinsic objective potentiality of their own motion that it makes sense to speak of the 'ideal reproduction' of the 'inner life' of the object in question.

An illustrative case of the second position with respect to Hegel's Logic can be found directly in the work of Tony Smith (1990). According to this author, Logic deals with the fundamental categories of thought that are necessary to grasp the internal intelligibility of reality. In this treatment, Smith argues, Hegel 'derives three general types of categorial structures', one of 'simple unity', one of 'difference' and one of 'unity in difference' (Smith, 1990, pp. 5-6). Then, to the extent that these categorical structures are immanently and contradictorily connected, it is possible to 'construct a systematic theory of categories using the dialectical method' (Smith, 1990, p. 6). In Smith's words:

> Hegel's system is a reconstruction of the actual process (the object) in thought to capture its internal intelligibility. Hegel does this by taking the fundamental determinations of the object and then noting that these categories define structures that are of simple unity, or of difference, or of unity in difference. These structures can then be systematically ordered in such a way as to construct a linear progression of the categories that move step by step from the simplest and most abstract determinations to more complex and concrete categories. The affirmation and overcoming of dialectical contradictions is the driving force of this movement. (Smith, 1990, p. 13).

Thus read, according to this author, Logic would be entirely 'compatible with Marx's materialist ontology' (Smith, 1990, p. 36), so that there is no basis for rejecting it as idealist.

Nor can such a foundation be found where, having completed the categorical construction, Hegel develops the realm of nature and of the human spirit as creations of the absolute Idea, for, according to Smith, in these passages Hegel 'is indulgently offering images of thought, imaginative representations which in their own terms belong to a pre-philosophical level' (Smith, 1990, p. 11), a presentation that Hegel nevertheless found necessary to use to make his philosophy accessible to an audience that was mostly Christian.

Beyond the ever-embarrassing question of textual evidence, Smith's interpretation of Hegelian philosophy is plausible, and if correct would effectively exempt Hegel from his status as an absolute idealist. However, not being an absolute idealist does not necessarily mean being a materialist in the sense that Marx was. To sustain a Marxian materialist interpretation of Hegelian philosophy and of Logic in particular much more is needed. It is necessary, first of all, to prove that the structure of the real material being coincides with the structure of the ideal categories presented in this work. Smith's assertion that the categories presented in Logic 'are initially achieved in comparison with the empirically given' (Smith, 1990, p. 4), is not enough to prove such a coincidence, insofar as this procedure is far from guaranteeing that the systematic ordering of those categories reproduces the 'inner life of the real material being'. In other words, the question regarding the supposed materialist character of Logic cannot be established with the evidence that there Hegel recognizes an objective reality outside of thought. On the contrary, from our point of view, the crucial point is whether the Hegelian systematic dialectic of logical forms correctly reproduces the most abstract determinations of material reality 'by means of thought'.

As we will try to show in the next section, systematic development in Logic is inherently deficient as an ideal reproduction of the inner connection between the most abstract forms of material reality. In a nutshell, we will argue that, while its systematic dialectic begins with the simplest form of thought, its subsequent derivation of categories is forced to follow the immanent necessity of 'pure thought' as such and therefore cannot express the inner movement of the simplest determinations of 'real material being'. In this sense, we think that the peculiar form given by Hegel to his systematic dialectic is immanently tied to an idealist point of view, although as we will see for very different reasons from those put forward by Colletti. This does not mean that there is nothing to recover from the immanent development of the forms of thought offered by Hegel. It means only that its rational elements have to be carefully discovered within a presentation that is, by virtue of its idealist nature, structured in such a way that it has no place in a systematic materialist dialectic. In light of this, the main problem with Smith's perspective is not that his materialistic reading is unconvincing. Rather, his central problem is that he borrows

from Hegel a systematic dialectic that is simply deficient. As a consequence, it can be said that, along with his 'rational core', Smith can only take the 'mystical shell' with him.

The 'rational core' and the 'mystical shell' of Hegel's Logic Abstraction vs. Analysis

The starting point of Logic is 'pure being' as an 'empty thinking' (Hegel, 1993a, p. 107), that is, it is the being of thought. The profound significance of such a starting point for Hegelian philosophy, and in particular of its link with real being, has been the subject of numerous controversies among commentators (Henrich, 1990; Theunissen, 1978, for example). Few authors, however, have really criticized Hegel for beginning his systematic dialectic with a form of thought. We will consider the implications of this starting point for the main issue of this article later. For the moment, let us begin by critically examining the methodological procedure that is presupposed in Hegel's discovery of 'pure being' as the simplest category that sets in motion the subsequent dialectical unfolding of logical forms.

For Hegel, the choice of this categorical starting point and the procedure by which it is arrived at follows from his idea that true speculative philosophy must involve thought without presuppositions (Houlgate, 2005, p. 29 ff.). The 'beginning', says Hegel, 'must be absolute, or what here means the same thing, an abstract beginning; it must not presuppose anything.' (Hegel, 1993a, pp. 90-91). 'This requirement is carried out', he specifies in his Encyclopedia, 'properly in the decision to want to think with all purity, a decision that is carried out by freedom, which abstracts from everything and includes its own pure abstraction, that is, the simplicity of thinking' (Hegel, 2000, p. 182). In short, the procedure by which this pure abstraction can be arrived at is to exclude any thought that entails a certain complexity or concreteness, that is, any thought whose content presupposes the existence of any other thought. At this point, it might be objected that such 'abstraction from everything' is a purely formal procedure, which is not a scientifically founded abstraction but rather a formal abstraction. In fact, Hegel's own retrospective discussion of the beginning of science in the section on the 'Absolute Idea' points precisely in this direction: the simplest category which constitutes the starting point of Logic is there recognized as a 'universal abstract', which is said to be attained by abstracting from all determination (Hegel, 1993a, pp. 89-92; 1993b, pp. 563-566). In other words, pure being, as a category that sets in motion the (synthetic) movement of Logic, is a category similar to those of 'understanding' or 'representational thought', that is, one that can only grasp objects unilaterally in terms of its abstract self-identity (Hegel, 1993b, p. 522 ff.; 564). Indeed, as Carlson suggests, it can be said that it is actually the 'understanding' that carries out the act of abstraction and not the 'speculative thought' as such (Carlson, 2007, pp. 27-28). In this sense, Hegel considers the specificity of his 'absolute method' as

residing essentially in the synthetic moment, that is, in the reconstitution of the unity of the different moments of totality through a movement from its most abstract thought (pure being) to its most concrete (the absolute idea) (Hegel, 1993b, pp. 566-567; 576). Consequently, Hegel does not seem to recognize anything specifically speculative in the procedure through which he is brought to the simplest category.

However, for Hegel, the discussion regarding the scientific character of such a procedure is irrelevant at this stage of development since strictly speaking, the process of scientific knowledge has not yet begun. 'In being insofar as it is that which is simple and immediate,' he would say a few pages later in his Logic, 'the memory that it is a result of perfect abstraction [...] has remained behind science' (Hegel, 1993a, p. 128). Thus, as one commentator ingeniously puts it, it could even be said that in the process of abstraction required to attain pure being 'we must even abstract and set aside – indeed deliberately forget – the very fact that pure being is the product of abstraction' (Houlgate, 2005, p. 87). In fact, once one adopts the point of view of 'absolute knowledge' and, consequently, takes thought itself as the truly valid immediate object of investigation, the scientifically deficient character of the procedure through which the simplest category has been attained does not compromise the validity of the further dialectical unfolding that 'pure being' sets in motion. The essential point is that, whatever the procedure used, in this process the speculative philosopher has never abandoned the terrain of his object, that is, pure thought. In this sense, once one adopts (some version of) the identity between being and thought that is reached in the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel's argument is entirely coherent on this point, although, as we will argue below, inherently idealist.

If one adopts a materialist point of view, on the other hand, the procedure of formal abstraction is much more problematic. In fact, insofar as the immediate object of knowledge is taken not a thought but a form of existence of the 'material being', the formal abstraction consisting in arbitrarily separating all the specific determinations that constitute an object necessarily implies leaving the terrain of the object that one claims to know, that is, material reality itself. Following the example given by Marx in The Poverty of Philosophy (Marx, 1987, p. 65), if we abstract from the materials of which a house is composed, the result will be the purely ideal representation of a house without materials, something that has no real correlation, since there is no house without materials in reality. If, therefore, one then continues to abstract from other components of this initial object now converted into a representation, one is no longer dealing with existing real objects, but with purely ideal or mental abstractions, i.e., with 'pure thoughts'. On this basis, the subsequent reconstitution of the unity of the object can only result in an ideal construction in itself alien to the object of knowledge that constituted the starting point. Consequently, for a materialist, the corollary of using formal abstraction is, if not to become a Hegelian

idealist, to fall back into Kantian dualism, where the theoretical construction, however internal consistency it may be, is irremediably separated from the real object of knowledge.

From a materialist point of view, therefore, the critique of Hegelian philosophy must start from the critique of the formal abstraction with which it begins. Such is the key to Feuerbach's foundational critique. Hegelian philosophy, says this author, 'presupposes nothing, which means nothing more than: it abstracts from all objects (Objekt) immediate, that is, sensibly given, distinguished from thinking; in short, it abstracts from everything that can be endlessly abstracted from thinking, turning this act of abstraction from all objectivity into the beginning of itself' (Feuerbach, 1999a, p. 64). Then, as he points out in another text, 'the path of speculative philosophy from the abstract to the concrete [...] never arrives at true, objective reality, but always and only at the realization of its own abstractions'. (Feuerbach, 1999b, pp. 29-30). In the same vein, evidently influenced by Feuerbach, is the critique of Hegelian idealism that Marx presents just a few years later in his Poverty of Philosophy,

> 'Should we be surprised that anything, at the highest degree of abstraction –since there is abstraction and not analysis– appears in the state of a logical category? [...] By abstracting in this way from every subject the so-called accidents [...], at the highest degree of abstraction, one ends up obtaining logical categories as substance. Thus, the metaphysicians, who, when making these abstractions, imagine they are performing analysis and who, as they become more and more separated from the objects, imagine they are approaching them to the point of penetrating them, those metaphysicians are likewise correct in saying that the things of our world are embroideries whose weave is made up of the logical categories.' (Marx, 1987, p. 65).

What is significant about this critique, and what is particularly relevant to the question that concerns us, is that it already gives a glimpse of Marx's alternative to Hegelian abstraction: to make analyses. Unfortunately, despite this stark contrast and Marx's repeated differentiation of analysis as a particular moment in scientific proceeding (Marx, 1997, p. 21; 1989, p. 443), nowhere in his work can one find a detailed presentation of the specific form that this analytic process must take within his materialist 'systematic dialectical' approach.[7] Likewise, the literature specialized in the methodological foundation of the

[7] Note that in the famous Introduction of 1857 (Marx, 1997, pp. 1-33), which is commonly presented as the canonical text on the dialectical method (cf. Schmidt, 1973, pp. 59-62), in no passage does Marx even manage to point out the question of the specifically dialectical form that it has in analysis (and certainly not of that which corresponds to the synthesis). Rather, Marx simply differentiates analysis and synthesis as two moments of scientific procedure. As can be deduced from its treatment in Hegel's Logic, this differentiation is not exclusive to the dialectical method. In fact, analytic and synthetic knowledge are figures of the idea of the

Marxian critique of political economy, despite the important contributions it has made, has focused mainly on the synthetic aspect of dialectical presentation at the expense of a thematization of the peculiar role that the moment of analysis has in dialectical research in general and in Capital in particular (Backhaus, 1978; Arthur, 2004; Robles Báez, 2005; for example). Our argument, in contrast, is that it is essential to grasp the difference between materialist analysis and Hegel's idealist abstraction. Certainly, many authors have identified and highlighted the distinction between the abstractions of Marx's critique of political economy and those of the conventional social sciences (Murray, 1988, p. 121 ff.; Clarke, 1991, p. 81 et seq.; Gunn, 2005). However, in no case have they been critically linked to the Hegelian process of abstraction. More importantly, as Iñigo Carrera points out, most of these authors have overlooked that the difference between the different types of abstraction identified results from the very form of the process of knowledge through which these abstractions are reached (Iñigo Carrera, 2013b). That is, they have overlooked that the difference in the form of scientific knowledge does not only concern the synthetic or genetic moment as is usually assumed, but also, and especially, the analytical moment.

Although Marx left no written formalization of the specificity of materialist analysis, it is possible to recognize its concrete functioning in the 'commodity analysis' with which Capital begins. As he presents it retrospectively in his discussion with Wagner, this analysis proceeds neither from the concepts of political economy nor from any "concept" (Marx, 1982, p. 48). Instead, it begins with the immediate observation of the 'simplest social form in which the product of labour takes shape in present-day society' (Marx, 1982, p. 48). Given this starting point, Marx goes on to take the individual commodity 'in hand' and analyze 'the formal determinations it contains as a commodity, which imprint on it the seal of commodity' (Marx, 2000, p. 108). The discovery of these 'formal determinations' begins by confronting the use-value of the individual commodity as the material carrier of a historically specific attribute of the products of labour: their capacity to be exchanged. As

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true that do not yet fully express the content of conceptual knowledge and that, in such a limitation, do not yet reach the fullness of realization of the concept that will only be actualized in the form of the absolute idea (Hegel, 1993b, pp. 512-551). And it is only in this last section that Hegel discusses the specificity of his "absolute method" and where, as this article argues, he confuses analysis with abstraction. At this point, it is interesting to note that Marx is not expounding his own method but that of 'political economy', as the title of the section in question indicates. Or, in any case, what he is explicitly commenting on in some of these passages is something that the dialectical method has in common with the conventional scientific method without giving any clue as to what it is that differentiates them. Of course, certain expressions or terminology (e.g., the concrete as the "unity of multiple determinations") implicitly speak of Hegel's influence on Marx's own method. But it can only be found in the concrete development contained in Capital. In the 1857 Introduction there is nothing that by itself, that is, without a critical reading of Hegel's Logic and a detailed study of the expository architecture of Capital, can be taken as a kind of stylized presentation of the general form of movement of Marxian materialist dialectics. Hence, that same text lends itself to the most disparate interpretations of Marx's method, and all of them with textual evidence from the pen of the "master".

with all real forms, the first thing to be found when considering this capacity is nothing more than its immediate manifestation, that is, the 'quantitative relation [...] in which use-values of one kind are exchanged for use-values of another kind' (Marx, 1999, p. 45). The next step in analysis, therefore, is to unveil the abstract form, that is, the content behind this specific formal attribute that the commodity has. Thus, the subsequent analysis reveals that 'exchange value' is in fact the 'mode of expression, or 'form of manifestation', of a differentiable content' – that is, value – whose substance is abstract labour materialized in the commodity (Marx, 1999, pp. 45-47).

As is widely recognized by the literature, in this particular phase of Marxian exposition, the sequence of argument consists of going from form to content. However, what is relevant is not simply to notice this course – which in any case is explicitly pointed out by Marx in those same pages – but to recognize the precise way in which properly dialectical analysis discovers the content behind the form and, consequently, its internal connection. As Iñigo Carrera has pointed out, in the conventional scientific method, analysis consists of separating the attributes that are repeated in a concrete form from those that do not, in order to arrive at a common attribute that, in turn, makes it possible for the mental construction to define the concrete form analyzed (Iñigo Carrera, 2013b, p. 50 et seq.). Hegelian abstraction, on the other hand, consists in setting aside every particular characteristic of a concrete form in search of the 'abstract universal' that constitutes its simplest element. Beyond their differences, these two procedures have in common the fact that they both result strictly in mental abstractions or categories which, by their very nature as 'pure thoughts', cannot but be completely alien to the concrete forms of the material reality from which they started. In contrast, the dialectical method used by Marx analyzes a concrete form by confronting it, above all, as the bearer of the qualitative potentiality of its own transformation. Then, and consequently, he recognizes this concrete form as the realization of the qualitative potentiality of its abstract form, the unveiling of which thus arises as the immediately necessary step of the ongoing analysis. Therefore, the dialectical appropriation of the universe of the different concrete real forms does not consist in the identification of what distinguishes each concrete form on the basis of the degree of repetition of certain attributes of its own. Nor in the operation of abstracting from any particular determination. It consists, instead, in analytically separating the different forms by discovering in each particular concrete form the realized potentiality of another real form, which is abstract with respect to the first, but concrete with respect to another form of which it itself is realized potentiality.

Thus, while conventional scientific knowledge conceives of real forms as immediate affirmations and therefore as self-subsisting entities, what distinguishes the process of dialectical analysis is that, in the same analytic movement, it grasps both the concrete

form it examines and the more abstract form of which it itself is its developed form of existence. In other words, dialectical materialist knowledge recognizes each form as the affirmation through its own negation of another, more abstract form of its own, and therefore always recognizes them as subjects of its own movement. In turn, and precisely for this reason, Marx's dialectical analysis, as opposed to Hegelian abstraction or conventional scientific knowledge, never abandons the terrain of the real. Both the immediate concrete form that he confronts and the more abstract one that he discovers through analysis are totally objective realities, real determinations of the object being examined. Thus considered, therefore, analysis has to renew itself in the discovery of each abstract form, considering it in turn as a real concrete whose internal content is another abstract form that needs to be revealed. And it is only when all the internal determinations of the object under study have been discovered by this analytic path that the investigation must move on to the reconstitution of real motion, returning from the most abstract to the most concrete forms of the object in question. To put it in the terminology of the famous Introduction of 1857, only once one has advanced 'analytically' from 'the real and the concrete' to 'ever simpler' forms of it, then can one 'resume the return journey' where 'abstract determinations', this time moving by themselves, 'lead to the reproduction of the concrete by the way of thought.' (Marx, 1997, p. 21).[8]

[8] In this sense, dialectical research includes both analysis and synthesis. In contrast, the exposition as such should, in principle, be exclusively synthetic, since it is in this second moment that the ideal reproduction of the self-movement of the forms of the real is found. However, for pedagogical or didactic reasons, the researcher may decide to include in the exposition "stylized" moments of analysis, thus making clear both the unity of the two instances of the procedure of dialectical knowledge and their respective specific forms. As has been pointed out in another text, this expository structure appears recurrently throughout Volume I of Capital (Starosta, 2008). In contrast, many authors unilaterally equate analysis with research, thus reducing the synthetic or genetic procedure to an abstract exposition method. Such is the case of Schmidt (1973), who loses sight of the specific form of analysis in the critique of political economy by reducing it to the appropriation of the categories provided by political economy, which would simply be resignified and reordered through synthetic exposition (see infra note 9). Within the New Dialectic, discussions have focused on the synthetic moment of the dialectical method, and only very late has its unity with analysis been examined in detail. The most recent and exhaustive treatment of the question can be found in Reuten (2014), who, erroneously but remarkably for the purposes of our argument, characterizes the Marxian analysis through which the commodity is discovered as the simplest concrete of the capitalist mode of production, as an abstraction that identifies an abstract universal, making an explicit analogy with Hegel's procedure through which he identifies pure being as the beginning of Logic. In the German debate, this issue has been discussed in much more detail. However, it has not been present among the authors of the so-called Neue Marx-Lektüre (i.e., Backhaus and Reichelt), but among East German authors. For a review of this, see Fineschi (2009b, pp. 57-61).

The ideal reproduction of an ideal process vs. the ideal reproduction of a real process

Let us now return to the being of thought with which Logic begins. As we have seen, it is a being that is the product of simple abstraction and, consequently, from a materialist point of view, it is not a real being; it is a being that exists only as a being of thought. At this point, however, it might seem that it is still possible to maintain, as Smith intends to do, that this being of thought reflects the real material being. Indeed, taking Hegel's simple characterization of this pure being, it could be argued that, insofar as the least that can be said of a real being is that it simply is, the pure being of thought and the real being must coincide on this point; that is, that the structure of the ideal being would coincide totally with the structure of the real material being (Houlgate, 2005, pp. 140-142). However, nothing says that the simplest way in which we can characterize something necessarily coincides with the simplest way in which that something exists. According to our argument developed in the previous section, in order to be able to assert that this pure being coincides with the simplest form of the real, we should have started from a real concrete and, by means of a materialist analysis – that is, without ever leaving our object – arrive at 'pure being' as its simplest form of existence. But, as we have seen, this is not what Hegel has done, and it is certainly not what the interpreters who claim to be materialist do.[9]

However, if we still insist on taking for granted the correspondence between one being and the other, the difference between the Hegelian ideal construction and material reality re-emerges in the second step of the dialectical unfolding: the transformation of 'pure being' into 'pure nothingness' (Hegel, 1993a, p. 107). For if in the case of the pure being of thought there is still the formal possibility that it is reflecting a pure real material being, in the case of the pure nothingness of thought such a formal possibility is out of the picture, since it goes without saying that there is no pure real material nothingness. As Feuerbach warned, 'the very opposition of being and nothingness [...] exists only in

[9] Smith is an interesting case of this type of interpreter because, despite correctly distinguishing between what is a 'formal abstraction' and a 'real abstraction' (Smith, 1990, p. 60), he considers that Hegelian analysis is materialist because it has as its starting point the 'appropriation of the results of empirical studies' carried out by the 'empirical sciences' (Smith, 1990, p. 4). The author does not notice, however, that precisely because they are results acquired according to the conventional scientific method, they are necessarily formal abstractions and, consequently, in themselves purely ideal. Recovering the same passages from Hegel that this author cites (Hegel, 2005, p. 219), Schmidt falls into exactly the same error of considering the result of the empirical sciences as the starting point of dialectical knowledge (Schmidt, 1973, pp. 62-65). Moreover, it should be noted that, in addition to not belonging to a systematic text of Hegel's work, the aforementioned passages of Hegel begin with the affirmation that 'science as such can never start from the empirical' (Hegel, 2005, p. 219

representation' since 'there is being in reality, or rather the real itself; but nothingness, non-being, exist only in representation and reflection' (Feuerbach, 1974, p. 62).

Once the existence of being and nothingness outside of thought has been discarded, one could finally still look for the alleged correspondence between the Hegelian ideal construction and real materiality in its third step: 'becoming' (Hegel, 1993a, p. 108). In fact, this category seems to be able to reflect the form that materialist analysis recognizes from the outset to its object, that is, the form of the object that becomes. Considered in this way, being and nothingness would be only analytical moments necessary to find the true simplest category, becoming, which would finally reflect the simplest form of the real: being a subject that sets its own movement.[10] Thus, despite conceiving it as a movement of pure thought, it would seem that Hegel would have managed to capture the simplest form of real material being. However, for Hegel 'becoming' is a category that is still very far from fully expressing the contradiction that constitutes the simple movement of a self-determining subject. It happens that, since it is a development of thought that starts from the simplest form of thinking, a whole set of more complex thoughts must still be developed in order to express this simple movement. That is why the Hegelian exposition must still continue with the unfolding of a long series of categories.

In fact, if we continue with this dialectical display of categories, we find that the moment in which the simple movement of self-production of a subject is fully expressed only arrives with the category of 'being-for-itself', a few pages later, where it is concluded that finally 'qualitative being is fulfilled' and, consequently, we are faced with the 'absolute determinate being' (Hegel, 1993a, p. 201). From a materialist point of view, however, this development only opens the question of why the knowledge of the real needs to pass through such imperfect forms of ideally expressing the simplest movement of qualitative determination. In reality, the imperfect ways of reproducing 'affirmation by self-negation' are not materially constitutive of what this movement really is. Therefore, from a materialist perspective, one can only conclude that the deployment of such categories is simply superfluous.

However, a final justification of the Hegelian deployment of categories could affirm that the exposition that precedes the 'being for itself' corresponds to the analytic process of discovering the category that is capable of expressing the real movement of affirmation

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[10] Such is the interpretative line of Theunissen who, interpreting the Hegelian method of exposition as a method that is at the same time a critique of categories, considers 'being' and 'nothingness' as 'unreal' determinations and therefore 'apparent' (Theunissen, 1978, p. 100). In our reading, on the other hand, such categories are for Hegel as constitutive of the real as the category of 'becoming' or any other subsequent category. In this regard, see Houlgate's sharp criticism of Theunissen's aforementioned interpretation, as well as other similar ones (Houlgate, 2005, p. 280 et seq.).

through one's own negation. However, this interpretation clashes directly with the Hegelian conception according to which these categories have the same status of objectivity as 'being-for-itself', since they are conceived as equally true moments in the development of spiritual substance; they are, in fact, conceived as its simplest forms. In this sense, the movement from the poorest forms of expressing qualitative being to its consummation in 'being-for-itself' is for Hegel a purely synthetic movement. Consequently, to accept the whole of Hegelian development necessarily implies taking with it a set of categories completely alien to real movement. In other words, it implies carrying alongside the 'rational nucleus' (i.e., the category that finally expresses the determination at stake in its proper form) the 'mystical shell' under which it finds itself (i.e., the whole series of imperfect categories that pure thought needs to postulate before it reaches the fullness of its content).

A reading of Logic from a materialist point of view cannot, therefore, be based simply on leaving aside Hegelian idealist terminology, much less on elucidating the logical structure presented by the deployment of categories, because both the categories and their deployment are, from the beginning, of an idealist character. On the contrary, a materialist reading must be based solely on recognizing what are the real determinations that, at certain moments in the idealistic deployment of the categories, can become reflected. As is evident, the recognition of these determinations can only be realized vis-à-vis the knowledge of the simplest real determinations of the real. Strictly speaking, therefore, what is at stake is not simply to read Logic from a materialist point of view, but rather to appropriate its 'use value' in order to rewrite it materialistically, that is, to unfold the simplest determinations of the real in its internal connection. Of course, this is far beyond the scope of this article. In this brief critical presentation, we have hardly referred to the starting point of this development, which we have identified with the Hegelian 'being-for-itself'.[11] In this sense, our purpose here is rather more modest: it is simply to highlight the intrinsically idealistic character of Hegel's systematic development and to show its specific difference from the materialist approach developed by Marx.

To conclude our brief presentation of the 'mystical shell' present in Logic, let us consider the question of the general form that the unfolding of the categories takes, that is, what appears as the Hegelian method of development. Towards the end of his work Hegel considers this question at length. 'What is to be considered here as method,' he then says, 'is only the movement of the concept itself [...] absolute universal activity' (Hegel, 1993b, p.

[11] For this we simply base ourselves on the work of Iñigo Carrera who, making a materialist analysis in the sense in which we have presented it in the previous section, arrives at this starting point – that is, by affirming itself through its own negation – as the most abstract form of the concrete form from which it initially started (Iñigo Carrera, 1992, pp. 3-5; 2013a, pp. 254-258).

562). However, since it is a pure movement of thought that must express itself, instead of conceiving this movement as the simple self-positioning of the subject, it is conceived as the unity of the three moments through which thought passes in order to grasp such a movement, and thus 'the whole form of the method' is conceived as 'a triplicity' (Hegel, 1993b, p. 574). In this way, the movement of affirming oneself by means of one's own negation, which constitutes the simplest form of existence of a subject, and which as such results in the general form that dialectical unfolding takes, is presented in Hegel under the abstract sequence of an affirmation, a negation, and finally a negation of the negation. In other words, instead of directly presenting the third moment, which alone constitutes the actual reality of the object, Hegel needs to present the first two moments, which are only formal steps through which thought must pass in order to grasp the object, as constituent parts of the object's reality. This 'triplicity of the absolute method' which derived from the ideal character of Hegelian philosophy, is another of the axes of Marx's critique in his Poverty of Philosophy,

> What, then, is this absolute method? The abstraction of movement. What is the abstraction of movement? Movement in an abstract state. What is motion in the abstract state? The purely logical formula of motion or the motion of pure reason. What does the movement of pure reason consist of? In situating oneself, opposing oneself, combining oneself, formulating oneself as thesis, antithesis and synthesis, or in affirming oneself, in denying oneself, and in denying its negation. (Marx, 1987, p. 66)

In short, what is rational in Hegelian philosophy, its method of unfolding the immanent necessity of the object, appears in the mystical form of the tripartite structure of the movement of thought. And, again, this mystical shell derives directly from the fact that it is an ideal reproduction, not of a real concrete object, but of an ideal object: thought itself. The mystical character of the Hegelian construction arises, therefore, from the fact that it is an ideal reproduction of the ideal. In contrast, for Marxian criticism, which has started from a concrete object by making analysis and not abstraction, and consequently has never left it, the moment of dialectical deployment can only be the ideal reproduction of the concrete.

Of all the places in which Marx presents this type of reproduction, it is also in the first chapter of Capital that it can perhaps be found in its most stylized form and contrasted with Hegelian reproduction. This reproduction begins only in section three of this chapter, precisely because it has been preceded by a materialist analysis, as we have briefly

examined above.[12] As we have seen, materialist analysis involves discovering the hidden content in the form of manifestation of the concrete that is confronted. In this sense, however much this form may be recognized as the very realization of its own content, the analytic moment does not ideally reflect the immanent self-movement of the object under examination. Obviously, if dialectical analysis reveals that the form of value is the concrete form in which the objectification of the abstract and socially necessary character of private labor asserts itself as an abstract form, the separation between the two already says something about the real relationship involved. But this something is nothing more, so to speak, a 'signaling', an external observation. The true exposition of the inner connection between content and form, and therefore its explanation, takes place only in the synthetic moment of reproduction. This moment, then, consists in ideally following the realization of the potentiality immanent in the commodity discovered by analysis, i.e., value. From then on, the commodity ceases to be apprehended in its exteriority as an 'inert' external object to be recognized as the subject of its own movement.

The ideal reproduction thus consists in the unfolding of the movement now exposed in 'the language of commodities' (Marx, 1999, p. 64). Because value is an objectivity 'of a purely social nature' it has no way of expressing itself in the material body of the commodity. Therefore, the commodity itself can only express its value in its 'social relation' to another; more precisely, in the material body of that other commodity. In this way, 'value' takes the concrete form of 'exchange value' as its necessary form of manifestation. In its most developed form, value acquires an independent existence as 'money' and the expression of value corresponding to this existence acquires the figure of 'price'. Thus, the 'internal antithesis' present in the commodity develops as the 'external antithesis' of the commodity and money. At the same time, the commodity's capacity to change itself in order to become asserted as a social power monopolized by the money form.

Seen from the point of view of qualitative content, in the course of the development of this reproduction, the questions that the analytic moment was powerless to answer are answered. That is, it is the development of the expression of value that unfolds the explanation of why the objectification of the abstract character of privately performed labor takes the social form of value, or, more simply, why private labor is a producer of value. In short, the essential point is that it is only the expression of value that progressively reveals the problem that the commodity form adopted by the product of labor comes to solve: the mediation of the establishment of the unity of social labor when it is carried out privately and independently. And insofar as this unity is condensed into the form of money, it is the

[12] See Starosta (2008) for a detailed examination of the structure of Marx's exposition of chapter one of Capital.

unfolding of its determinations, synthesized in the 'peculiarities' of the form of equivalent and derived from its general determination as the form of direct interchangeability, that provides the answer to the question of why socially necessary labor performed privately and independently should produce value.

It should be noted, however, that the properly dialectical unfolding of the movement of this qualitative determination is in essence already achieved in the examination of the simple form of value present in the relation between two commodities. The subsequent passages to the other more developed forms of value are a purely formal movement that limits itself to generalizing and making explicit the content already expressed in the simple form, that is, the immanent necessity of value to acquire an external and differentiated mode of existence. Controversially speaking, the sequence of the most developed forms of value is not structured according to a necessity immanent in each of these forms, as presented by some authors (Arthur, 2004; Robles Báez, 2005), but only to the need present in the simple form. As Iñigo Carrera points out, 'this deployment' of the forms of value 'does not imply that a simpler form engenders a more concrete one, but that the deployment of the need for the former puts us in front of the evidence of the necessary existence of the latter' (Iñigo Carrera, 2013b, pp. 58-59). Such, in our view, is the true meaning of Marx's remark with which he precedes his examination of the forms of value: 'The secret of every form of value necessarily lies hidden under this simple form of value' (Marx, 1999, p. 59).

In the light of this tight synthesis of the reproduction of the simplest necessity inherent in the commodity, let us consider more closely the crucial difference between Marxian and Hegelian ideal reproduction. Specifically, Marx's ideal reproduction of the commodity form adopted by the product of labor simply follows the realization of its immanent need to assert itself through the development of a more concrete form of its existence, money; that is, it ideally follows the affirmation of the commodity through its own negation in money. In contrast to the Hegelian ideal reproduction, Marx does not need to mediate his exposition here with the presentation of inadequate forms in which thought conceives of the immanent determinations of the commodity. For Marx, such inadequate conceptualizations are not constitutive determinations of the objective reality of the commodity and therefore have no place in the systematic unfolding of its internal life.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to contribute to the most recent Marxist debate regarding the link between Hegel's Logic and Marx's Capital carried out within the so-called "New Dialectic". Succinctly, our argument is that in the first of these works we are able to discover the simplest movement of the real, that is, the movement of self-determination of the subject in the form of affirmation through self-negation. As a consequence, he

manages to correctly present the scientific method as the systematic unfolding of the internal life of the subject that is intended to be known. In contrast to Marxist readings that reject the dialectical method, we have argued that this is the 'rational core' of Hegel's Logic and, as such, is not inherently linked to 'absolute idealism'. However, we have also seen that, instead of taking the simplest form of real material being as its starting point, Hegel's exposition begins with the simplest form of thought, 'pure being' thought. Consequently, the systematic dialectic that is mounted on this basis inevitably unfolds a whole series of redundant or superfluous categories that correspond only to the immanent necessity of thought and do not express any objective determination of real material being. Thus, the aforementioned 'rational core' of Hegel's Logic is covered, both in its content and in its form of development, by a 'mystical shell'.

For his part, we have argued that the immediate reason why Hegel takes this spurious starting point lies in his methodological procedure of preceding all knowledge with a process of extreme formal abstraction consisting in mentally separating every particular determination from the object to be known until a completely empty universal is reached, precisely the thought of pure being or pure thought being. In contrast, we have seen that Marx finds a materialist alternative to this formal abstraction in dialectical analysis. This procedure begins by discovering the actual content existing within the concrete that is immediately confronted with perception. Then, the repetition of this analysis in each abstract form discovered leads to the discovery of the simplest immanent content of the initial concrete. Thus, because one has never left the real object, instead of arriving at a pure thought being, one arrives directly at the process of self-determination of the subject, that is, at the simplest content of affirmation through the very immanent negation of the initial object of dialectical investigation.

From our arguments, three conclusions can be drawn regarding the current debate on the method of the critique of political economy. In the first place, insofar as the ideal reproduction of the concrete needs to ideally reflect the specific immanent determinations of the object it seeks to know, the dialectical method cannot consist in applying the 'great laws of dialectics' or the 'logical structures' to the more concrete domains of thought. In this sense, the process of affirmation through one's own negation cannot become an absolute general principle to be applied to economic categories. On the contrary, it must be discovered and reproduced ideally in the qualitative specificity of its concrete forms of existence. Secondly, the problem with Hegel's approach lies not simply in his absolute idealism but, fundamentally, in the methodological procedure by which the starting point of development is arrived at and in the form taken by the subsequent reconstitution of the unity of the immanent determinations of the object. That is, even if one were to accept Smith's proposition that Hegel was not an idealist because he regarded the real as an

existence independent of thought, from a materialist point of view his systematic dialectic is completely flawed. Finally, although we have not dealt with it directly in this article, it also follows from our argument that the structure of Logic and that of Capital cannot be treated as homologous, as Arthur suggests. As shown in the last section, the general form that the synthetic moment of the dialectical method takes in both works differs substantially since the Hegelian reproduction demands a series of completely superfluous formal steps which, as such, have no place in the materialist ideal reproduction.

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